

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. House of Representatives is to consider today provisions extending the 2001 Patriot Act which was set to sunset at the end of last year. Honda considers the Senate modifications to the Patriot Act, S. 2271, as superficial at best, stating: “I do not feel that the token changes made to the PATRIOT Act are sufficient to protect our civil liberties and therefore I will vote against this measure.” Today, Congressman Mike Honda will vote against the U.S. Senate revisions to the Patriot Act, calling them mere window-dressing.

Enacted immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks, the PATRIOT Act gives federal officials greater authority to track and intercept communications, both for law enforcement and foreign intelligence gathering purposes.

U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies already have the authority to investigate and prosecute anyone whom they have probable cause to believe has committed, or is planning to commit a crime. Government officials also have the authority to engage in surveillance of anyone whom it has probable cause to believe is a foreign power or spy - whether or not the person is suspected of any crime.

“One of my biggest concerns deals with National Security Letters (NSLs),” Honda stated. An NSL is an FBI tool used to compel companies and other entities, to give the Bureau private information about their customers -- and keep the request secret. Americans are concerned that NSLs could, and would be applied to libraries for example. This measure would exempt libraries from NSLs only if they don't offer Internet access, The American Library Association puts the number of libraries without Internet access near zero. “Whether intended or not, S. 2271 clears the way for libraries to be subjected to NSLs,” Honda stated.

“We most definitely need to utilize every resource to insure Americans are safe in their homes and workplaces; on their roads and rivers; and of our ports and borders – but we must be equally vigilant to protect American civil liberties guaranteed over 200 years ago in our Constitution. I, along with many of my colleagues, asked for moderate changes that would have ensured that these extraordinary new powers are directed solely at terrorists, and that each new power had meaningful court review. These efforts would have put the PATRIOT Act in line with the Constitution, as well as long-held American values,” the Congressman said.

“The House chose not to accept our Constitutional concerns. It is clear to me that S. 2271 continues to unnecessarily undermine fundamental American civil liberties. Therefore I will not support this measure,” Honda concluded.